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People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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World Communion of Reformed Churches

World Communion of Reformed Churches
150th Anniversary Service

The World Communion of Reformed Churches held a 150th anniversary service at the American International Church in London, on 12 July. The event was hosted by the United Reformed Church.

In a world fractured by war, displacement and despair, the church's most defiant act may not be in words—but in song.

"In a world fractured by war, displacement and despair, the church's most defiant act may not be in words—but in song." It was the powerful message resounded during the 150th anniversary service of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) at the American International Church in London, on July 12 The event was hosted by the United Reformed Church (URC)—one of the WCRC's 232 member churches and a founding body of the organization.

The Rev. Najla Kassab, President of the WCRC, delivered a sermon that offered a stirring vision of moral imagination. Rather than beginning with theology, she shared the story of a lawyer burdened by ethical compromises who confessed it was not the sermon but the music that drew her to church.

"Sometimes," she said, "it's the difference between life and death."

Drawing on global scenes of devastation—from the burning ruins of Notre Dame Cathedral to the blood-stained floors of a Syrian church—Kassab reflected on moments when words failed but singing endured. **For her, singing is an act of resistance, remembrance and renewal.**

Recalling her own childhood in war-torn Beirut, where she and her family sheltered underground amid bombs, she said: "When words do not help, you sing. Singing is not an escape. It's where God meets us—and reminds us we're not alone."

Rooted in Psalm 96, Kassab's sermon called the church to "sing a new song," not only in melody but in mission—to center worship in justice, foster inclusive communities, and carry the gospel's witness beyond sanctuary walls.

A Defiant Hope

Kassab closed her sermon with a powerful image inspired by George Watts' painting *Hope* — a blindfolded woman sitting on the globe, holding a broken instrument with only one string intact.

"That one string can still play a tune," she said. "It is not optimism — it is hope. Stubborn, dissonant, sung in a minor key perhaps—but still sung."

Looking ahead to the WCRC's General Council this October in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Kassab called the church to perseverance: "We may be the last string—but we will not be silent."

One Communion, One Song

The Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the WCRC, traced the organization's lineage from the 16th-century Reformation to its formal founding in London in 1875, when 21 Presbyterian churches gathered to form the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

He recounted its evolution: merging with Congregational and other Reformed bodies to create the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1970, then uniting with the Reformed Ecumenical

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Remembering Pope Francis:
A legacy of interreligious dialogue and hope

As the World Council of Churches continues to pay tribute to the unique contribution of Pope Francis to the Christian world, particular attention is given to the interreligious dimension of his leadership – a legacy of dialogue, mutual recognition, and bridge-building across faiths.

Pope Francis will be remembered for his unwavering commitment to encounter and dialogue in a world often divided by fear, conflict, and suspicion. From the earliest days of his pontificate, he engaged courageously with religious leaders from diverse traditions, advocating for a shared ethical commitment to peace, justice, and human dignity.

"He regarded interreligious dialogue as a sacred act as well as an encounter with the sacred mystery. He invited the followers of different religious traditions to go back to their respective religious classics and centuries of experiences and wisdoms to reawaken their respective spiritualities and

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People's Reporter
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Misleading findings of the World Bank

A recent report of the World Bank (WB) on 'Consumption-Inequality' in India creates confusion about the true picture of inequality in the Indian economy. The report shows that there is a drastic fall in extreme poverty and inequality in India. As per the report, the Gini Coefficient – a measure of inequality that ranges from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating extreme inequality – had fallen from 0.288 in 2011-12 to 0.255 in 2022-23, making India an economy with one of the lowest levels of inequality in the world. However, these figures conceal the true picture of inequality in the country. While inequality in consumption may be low – which is in itself a contested fact -, income and wealth inequalities in India are extremely high and have increased over time, making India one of the most unequal economies in the world.

It must be stated that inequality in consumption will always be lower than inequality in income and wealth. Because, poorer households spend more than their income on the necessities of life by using borrowed funds. They also spend borrowed funds on liquor and cosmetics, compared with people above poverty line who refrain from such expenses in order to save a part of their income. As a result, in societies where considerable number of people are poor, consumption inequality will be less than income and wealth inequalities. In fact, it is lower consumption inequality that causes transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. Therefore, this is not a good indicator.

Researchers on the World Inequality Database (WID) led by Thomas Piketty have estimated more accurate indicators of inequality in India. As per these estimates, the Gini Coefficient for pre-tax income for India in 2022-23 is 0.61, out of 218 economies. According to this, there are 170 economies with a lower inequality, making India one of the most unequal economies in the world.

India's Gini Coefficient for wealth inequality is 0.75, implying that wealth is more concentrated than income or consumption. In fact, the Gini Coefficient underestimates the sheer concentration of wealth in India today. It does not provide information on the relative share of wealth held by a fraction of the population. When considering wealth concentration of the top 1%, India emerges as one of the most unequal economies in the world. According to WID, in 2022-23, the top 1% of adults in India controlled almost 40% of net personal wealth. It must be mentioned that there are only four economies with a higher level of wealth concentration – Uruguay, Swaziland, Russia and South Africa. The story of the past few decades in India is one of rising income and wealth inequality. In fact, in such a scenario, reduction in consumption inequality is quite natural. Because, as income rises, the consumption of the poor would rise in greater proportion than the middle and upper classes, who save more out of their rising income. In fact, it is the mechanism of economic growth in India that helped concentration of income and wealth in the hands of a few, making Indian economy one of the most unequal economies in the world.

Thought for the Fortnight

'As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.'

– Neslson Mandela

Jubilee Vision for Social Reconstruction

A Biblical Exploration for Democracy, Justice and Peace

M. Mani Chacko

The name *Jubilee* derives its etymological meaning from *"the curved horn of the ram (Jobhel)"* which is sounded to announce the beginning of the holy year, which is the 10th day of the month of Tishri, on the day of 'Kippur.' This is the day of the public expiation of all the sins of the Jewish people. It was a type of testimony conversion after receiving God's pardon. Whoever received the remission of sins from God was obliged, at least, to forgive the sins of his/her fellow believers. Otherwise the repentance was not true. The Jubilee year put to the test such a capacity for conversion. *"Jobhel"* also meant *"remission"* because it implied the content of the Jubilee year.

Introduction

Scriptures play an important role in the formation of a people, particularly so, in the case of Hebrews. The interplay of democracy, justice, and peace, has been a dynamic narrative in Biblical texts, that resonates with the heart of a society constantly in search of meaning and reform. The Biblical vision of "shalom" (a state of holistic peace) offers an inspiring framework to reimagine democracy not merely as a system of governance but as a living, transformative community questing for both internal and collective well-being.

Among the different paradigms in the Hebrew scripture which are formative in nature and purpose, the Jubilee Vision is central. The Biblical Jubilee, which is integrally connected to the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year, was in the first place concerned with the restoration of justice. God's intention for the history of Israel was to establish a covenant relationship based on justice. The fundamental concept was that of a holy and just God requiring similar Godlike responses from the worshipping people (Lev. 17-26).

God specifically ordered protection for the vulnerable, naming explicitly the stranger, the widow, the orphan and the poor (Ex. 23:21-24). The charge was clear: *"You shall not pervert justice"* (Deut. 16:18). Charging interest, taking bribes, showing partiality, that is, discrimination, were some of the perversions of justice named. According to the description of the jubilee year found in Leviticus 25:10, every fiftieth year slaves were to be freed, debts forgiven and land restored to its original family as an expression of justice.

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A.The Jubilee Vision

a. Jubilee

The name *Jubilee* derives its etymological meaning from *"the curved horn of the ram (Jobhel)"* which is sounded to announce the beginning of the holy year, which is the 10th day of the month of Tishri, on the day of 'Kippur.' This is the day of the public expiation of all the sins of the Jewish people. It was a type of testimony conversion after receiving God's pardon. Whoever received the remission of sins from God was obliged, at least, to forgive the sins of his/her fellow believers. Otherwise the repentance was not true. The Jubilee year put to the test such a capacity for conversion. *"Jobhel"* also meant *"remission"* because it implied the content of the Jubilee year.

b. The Sabbatical Year

On the historical level, the Jubilee seems to be derived from the Sabbatical year, which imposes a rest on the land every seven years, and to leave the fruits of the land to the poor and strangers, as it is written: *"Say to the people of Israel, when you come into the land which I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruits; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. What grows of itself in your harvest you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you; for your cattle also and for the beasts that are in your land all its yield shall be for food."* (Lev. 25:2-7)

c. The Year of the Jubilee

The year of the Jubilee was after seven Sabbaths of years i.e. after 49 years (Leviticus 25:8). Like in the Sabbath years, slaves were to be set free and the land was to be left fallow. In addition, in the Jubilee year

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Isaiah 61 is the principal passage in the prophets in which release is proclaimed. He proclaims release ('*deror*' as found in Leviticus 25) for prisoners (or 'the blind' – the Hebrew word can mean either), for the captives and the broken hearted.

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Fr. Stan Swamy SJ

Person, Pilgrim, Prophet

Cedric Prakash

Fr. Stan Swamy was, indeed, a martyr for justice, a pilgrim of hope, and a prophet for our times. As we pay tribute to, and try to emulate, Stan Swamy; the person, pilgrim and prophet – the only way we can genuinely do so, is by not being silent spectators to the terrible realities, the crimes against humanity, which have engulfed our people and many of us, today!

When Fr Stan Swamy died on 5 July 2021, the world of truth and justice was shocked and saddened. Those who belonged to this group were convinced, that his death was not a natural one, but a pre-mediated institutional murder.

Yes, he was killed – because the powerful and other vested interests had no doubt that he was a real nuisance to their nefarious deeds. So he needed to be done away with. Theirs was a meticulously crafted plan: to interrogate and harass him, to incarcerate him in Taloja jail under an extremely draconian law, the 'Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), to continuously intimidate him through the National Investigation Agency (NIA) even whilst he was imprisoned, to deny him (an ailing 84-year-old frail, sickly Jesuit) a much –needed straw-sipper, proper food and adequate medicare; all this and more! The sad part is that they succeeded in their brutal game- plan. Stan Swamy was killed! He is a martyr! A martyr for justice! However, what his killers did not bargain for, is the plain truth, that legends like Stan Swamy never die, they are immortal: they live forever in hearts, souls and minds of ordinary mortals!

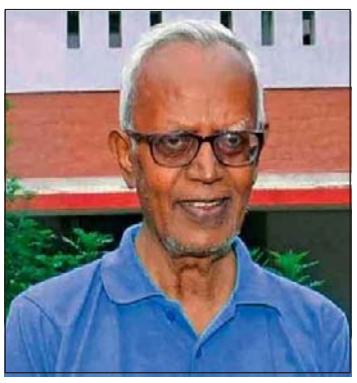
Four years after he physically left this earth, what does Stan Swamy mean to the legion of his admirers, his followers, those who were inspired by him and particularly, those for whom he gave his life for…He meant and continues to mean different things, to different sections of society. Stan epitomised human values at their best and radiated them in his non-negotiable commitment for a more just, equitable, fraternal and humane world!

One needs to take a cue from Stan Swamy's words just before his arrest on 8 October 2020. In a video-message which went viral he said, ***"Over the last two decades, I have identified myself with the Adivasi people and their struggle for a life of dignity and self-respect… In this process, I have clearly expressed my dissent over several policies and laws enacted by the government in the light of the Indian Constitution. I have questioned the validity, legality and justness of several steps taken by the government, and the ruling class. If this makes me a 'deshdrohi', then so be it. We are part of the process. In a way I am happy to be part of this process. I am not a silent spectator, but part of the game and ready to pay the price whatever be it…. I/we must be ready to face the consequences. I would just add that what is happening to me is not unique. Many activists, lawyers, writers, journalists, student leaders, poets, intellectuals and others who stand for the rights of Adivasis, Dalits and the marginalised and express their dissent to the ruling powers of the country, are being targeted. Grateful to all who have stood in solidarity with me all these years."*** These words give us a very powerful insight into Stan Swamy – ***the Person, the Pilgrim, the Prophet***

Stan, the Person:

One would need to write volumes on Stan the person. He was a human *par excellence*! All through his life he radiated compassion and concern for the other! He was selfless to the core! His focus was always 'his people'; an approach which was people-centric: a much needed value in today's world! He lived among the people – the poor, the Adivasis. He ate their food, sang their songs and danced with them. His life was extremely simple, to the point of frugality! He lived his vow of poverty to the fullest and in a most edifying manner; his material needs were few; his actual possessions were even less. The media had a field day, when the 'authorities' came to 'seize' his possessions from his room in Bagaicha where he lived till his arrest! They got almost nothing- which of course, made them a pathetic laughing stock! In his early days, Stan was a trainer, mentor, guide – inspiring hundreds of youth and others through social awareness programmes and to critically analyse what was happening in society; there are many today, from across the board, who are and will always be grateful for the profound impact he left on their lives. Several of them today have a social concern only because they were inspired by him.

For Stan, his heroes and motivators were the likes of Paolo Freire, Dom Helder Camara and Fr Pedro Arrupe. He read profusely and also wrote a lot.

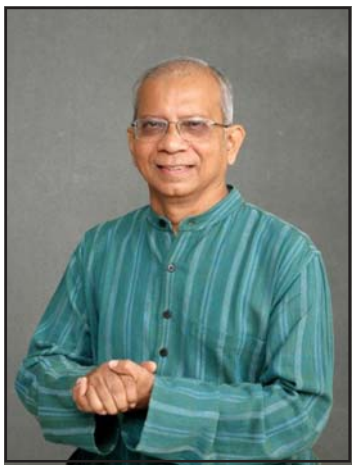


Fr. Stan Swamy SJ

Vatican II and the faith -justice mandate which emerged from the 32nd General Congregation of the Jesuits, greatly shaped Stan's way of proceeding: his thinking and his actions. Like Jesus his Master, he questioned and taught others to question, to be visible and vocal, to challenge all that is wrong and unjust in society and to respond constructively and positively to these issues.

Stan, the Pilgrim:

Pilgrims are those who walk, who walk with others, who walk the talk - they have a clear focus on their destination. They know where they are going and for what. Like St. Ignatius (the Founder of the Society of Jesus, Stan was a Jesuit)), he was a pilgrim in the true sense of the word. He believed in movements:



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and peace activist/writer.

people on the move, just like in the Biblical 'Exodus': the struggles of the 'people of God' for a more just, equitable, dignified and humane life. He identified himself with, and participated in peoples' movements. Stan left no stone unturned to ensure the Kingdom of God on earth belonged to all (particularly the sub-alterns) and that all would be together around the table of fellowship. For him that 'kingdom' was 'kinship'- the readiness (attitude and action) to serve others with love! *'Fratelli Tutti'* (Brothers and Sisters All) as Pope Francis reminds us in his Encyclical.

Like a true pilgrim, he lived a frugal life, unencumbered with baggage. His room in Bagaicha (now made into a Stan Memorial Museum), had the barest necessities; it bore witness to the life of a man on the move – a real pilgrim. Stan did all he could to empower the Adivasis.He accompanied them in their struggles and showed them the way to a better future!

Stan's life as a pilgrim should be a motivating factor today for all to get out of one's comfort zones, institutionalised lifestyles and cosmetic band-aid approaches, which reek of tokenism and opportunism, and to be attune to the grim realities which the ordinary, poor people face today! In a world which is divided and fragmented Stan is a beacon: a pilgrim of hope!

Stan, the Prophet:

A prophet whilst announcing the good news, must denounce all that is wrong, unjust and evil in society. One needs to take an unequivocal stand; to be visible and vocal. Stan, as an authentic disciple of Jesus, truly feared no one! He also shunned the hypocrites!He joined the Adivasis, the Dalits, other sub-alterns and civil society members, in the struggles against the violation of laws in acquiring land for mega projects for mining (coal mining is rampant in Jharkhand and in other tribal areas today) and infrastructural development which flout the rights of the downtrodden and tribals. He took a stand against the wanton destruction of the *'jal, jungle, jameen'* of the Adivasis. He consistently raised his voice in democratic, legitimate ways against the state-sponsored violations of laws and the assault on the democratic rights of people, aimed at paving way for unrestricted exploitation of land and natural resources. He questioned the non-implementation of the 5th Schedule of the Constitution why the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act [PESA], was being ignored. He strongly expressed his disappointment at the silence of the Government on the landmark 1997 Samantha Judgment of the Supreme Court; he spoke out strongly against the half-hearted action of the Government on the 'Forest Rights Act, 2006'.

He minced no words when he challenged his own, to stop over-institutionalisation, to stop catering to the privileged and elite sections of society (who have plenty of other possibilities and opportunities) and above all, to get out of the safety and security of one's comfort zone! **He was a visionary who took prophetic stands!** He once said, *"the Government calls me a 'deshdrohi' for defending the rights of the Adivasis. So be it!"* Stan was a prophet of and for our times. He radiated an unparalleled prophetic courage and ultimately, like all genuine prophets, he too paid the ultimate, supreme price of being one!

There is a bust of Fr. Stan Swamy in the garden of the Bagaicha, the Centre which he started in Ranchi. Etched on a marble stone just below this bust, are his incisive and immortal words, *"Why truth has become so bitter, dissent so intolerable, justice so out of reach… Yet truth must be spoken, right to dissent must be upheld and justice much reach the doorsteps of the poor. I am not a silent spectator!"*

Fr. Stan Swamy was indeed a martyr for justice, a pilgrim of hope and a prophet for our times. As we pay tribute to, and try to emulate, Stan Swamy; the person, the pilgrim and prophet – the only way we can genuinely do so, is by not being silent spectators to the terrible realities, the crimes against humanity, which have engulfed our people and many of us, today!

WORDTOON

No 'see'?
CRUDE
guys become
RUDE!

WORDTOON

The Gospel at the Bottom of the Pyramid

Arun Sam Amirtham

[Third and concluding part of the paper 'The Gospel at the Bottom of the Pyramid' published in the last issue of the People's Reporter]

The Gospel at the bottom of the pyramid is not a diluted message adapted for the poor — it is the Gospel in its most authentic form, revealed with particular clarity among those whom society marginalizes. In the faces of those at the economic periphery, we encounter not only human dignity that demands justice but also the face of Christ himself, who continues to say: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

The Parable of the Great Banquet and Lessons for the Indian Christian Church

The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) offers a powerful metaphor for understanding God's economy in relation to the BOP. In this narrative, after the initial invitees refuse to attend the feast, the host instructs his servant: "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:21). When spaces still remain, the invitation extends even further—to those "in the highways and hedges" (Luke 14:23).

This parable illustrates a divine reversal—those typically excluded become honoured guests, while those with privilege exclude themselves through their preoccupation with property and social obligations. **For the Indian Christian church, this parable offers several challenging lessons:**

1. Beyond token inclusion:

The banquet host doesn't merely set aside a few seats for the marginalised but reorients the entire gathering around their presence.

2. Intentional invitation:

The servant must "go out" to find those who would never presume to approach the banquet on their own—suggesting active rather than passive outreach.

3. Reimagined fellowship:

The banquet creates a new community across traditional social boundaries, challenging the church to examine how caste, class, and other divisions persist in its fellowship.

4. Abundant provision:

The feast imagery suggests that God's economy is not one of scarcity but of sufficient resources for all when justly distributed.

5. Urgency of response:

The host's command to "go out quickly" (Luke 14:21) implies that addressing exclusion is not a secondary concern but an immediate priority for authentic Christian community.

The Indian church, which often mirrors rather than challenges social stratification, is called to radical restructuring through this parable—to become a community where Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalised groups find not mere charity but honoured places at the table of leadership and theological reflection. This calls for nothing less than a fundamental rethinking of ecclesial identity, moving from a church that occasionally serves the poor to a church that identifies itself with and among the poor.

Practical Steps for Local Congregations

Moving from theological reflection, to concrete action, local congregations can take several steps to embody the Gospel at the bottom of the pyramid:

1. Asset-based community development:

Rather than viewing BOP communities through a deficit lens, churches should identify and build upon existing strengths, skills, and resources.

2. Inclusive leadership development:

Churches should intentionally identify and mentor leaders from marginalised communities, creating pathways to decision-making roles.

3. Contextual worship:

Liturgical elements—music, prayer forms, visual arts, preaching styles—should reflect the cultural expressions of BOP communities rather than imposing upper/middle-class aesthetic preferences.

4. Economic initiatives:

Congregations can establish savings groups, cooperatives, skill development programmes, and fair-trade initiatives that create sustainable livelihoods.

5. Advocacy partnerships:

Churches should stand with BOP communities in advocating for policy changes that address structural injustice, from land rights to education access.

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6. Theological education reform:

Seminaries and Bible Schools should develop curricula, teaching methodologies, and financial models that make quality theological education accessible to leaders from BOP backgrounds.

7. Church planting approaches:

New congregations in BOP contexts should develop indigenous models of church life rather than replicating patterns from more affluent settings.

8. Transformative rather than transactional relationships:

Churches must move beyond donor-recipient dynamics to genuine partnerships characterised by mutual learning and shared mission.

9. Prophetic witness:

Local congregations should courageously challenge economic and social structures that perpetuate poverty, both within their communities and in broader society.

These approaches represent not merely strategic adjustments but a fundamental reorientation of ecclesial identity and mission — one that recognizes God's presence and activity among those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Conclusion

As we reflect on the Gospel at the bottom of the Pyramid, we return to Gustavo Gutiérrez's powerful challenge: "The poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order." This statement reminds us that Christian engagement with economic marginalisation is not merely about ameliorating suffering but about transforming the systems that produce it. It calls the church beyond charitable responses that may assuage conscience without challenging privilege, toward prophetic solidarity that seeks genuine transformation.

This transformation finds resonance in the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew scriptures, particularly in Amos's thundering demand: "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). The prophet confronts religious practices disconnected from economic justice, calling instead for structural change that addresses the root causes of oppression. Similarly, Micah 6:8 reminds us that authentic faith requires us to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"—a holistic vision that unites personal piety with social responsibility.

The Gospel at the bottom of the Pyramid is not a diluted message adapted for the poor — it is the Gospel in its most authentic form, revealed with particular clarity among those whom society marginalizes. In the faces of those at the economic periphery, we encounter not only human dignity that demands justice but also the face of Christ himself, who continues to say: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

The task before the church, particularly in contexts of extreme inequality like India, is to reimagine both its theological frameworks and institutional structures to more faithfully embody this Gospel. This re-imagining requires listening to voices from the margins, confronting complicity with unjust systems, and building new models of community that prefigure God's coming kingdom — where the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

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The task before the church, particularly in contexts of extreme inequality as in India, is to reimagine both its theological frameworks and institutional structures to more faithfully embody this Gospel. This re-imagining requires listening to voices from the margins, confronting complicity with unjust systems, and building new models of community that prefigure God's coming kingdom — where the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Jubilee Vision for Social Reconstruction

A Biblical Exploration for Democracy, Justice and Peace

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everyone was to return to his own property (Leviticus 25:13). The main purpose of the Jubilee was to restore the family ownership of land. Each person was to return to the land allotted to his clan in the original division of the land under Joshua. In the rural and largely subsistence economy of Israel, land was the principal resource for production. Without land, people did not have the means to support themselves, let alone to produce monetary income. Land therefore became valuable as a means of accumulating and securing wealth. Land could only in effect be leased and not sold. If the family fell into financial hardship they could lease out their land for the number of years until the next Jubilee. Leviticus 25:25, 35, 39 and 47 all begin with the phrase 'if one of your countrymen becomes poor'. If the man still cannot support himself even with the kinsman's redemption, the kinsman must provide interest-free loans to help the poor relative (vv.35, 36). As a last resort, being unable to make a living on his land even with all this help, the poor man could sell himself and family into the service of his kinsman as a hired worker (v.39).

B. Interpretation of the Jubilee Laws

a. Literal:

Out of concern for the poor and the suffering communities of the world today it is tempting to invoke the Jubilee laws. There are scholars who promote a literal application of the Jubilee. They refer to various passages in Luke's Gospel in which Jubilee images are discernible (*Nazareth manifesto, sermon on the plain, Lord's Prayer and some parables).* They conclude that Jesus proclaimed a Jubilee in AD 26, and that such a 'redistribution of capital, accomplished every fifty years…would today be nothing utopian.' Fager (1993, p.121) guardedly states that the "*Jubilee does not retreat to an eschatological age or utopian society, rather it seeks to insinuate itself in the very existence of the real world…but the world does not seem to recognize true reality presupposed by the Jubilee, making literal observance.. impractical."*

b. Paradigmatic:

We cannot maintain that Luke 4:18 - 19 was only a socio-economic proclamation. But this does not mean that it is devoid of social content. Luke presents the Nazareth manifesto as programmatic for the whole of his two books – 'the preaching of good news to the poor'. Within this framework he presents the paradigmatic sermon (6:20-38) and paradigmatic prayer (11:2-4), both having a background in the Jubilee. While the Jubilee laws cannot be lifted out of their socio-economic context and be transplanted directly into modern society, they are relevant today. The way God directed the land to be occupied and utilized serves as a paradigm from which we draw principles and objectives for society today.

c. Typological:

The Sabbath, Sabbatical year and the Year of the Jubilee function in later Scriptures as typologies of the ideal age when Yahweh will reign supreme over the entire globe. The typology is contained within the concept of release – release from slavery and from debts. **Isaiah 61 is the principal passage in the prophets in which release is proclaimed. He proclaims release ('*deror*' as found in Leviticus 25) for prisoners (or 'the blind' – the Hebrew word can mean either), for the captives and the broken hearted.**

C. Connection of Jubilee to Democracy, Justice, and Peace

a. Justice:

The Jubilee vision is fundamentally about restorative justice. It seeks to correct imbalances, rectify historical wrongs, and ensure that everyone has a fair chance at life and well-being.

Economic Justice: By mandating debt forgiveness and land redistribution, it challenged the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few, advocating for a more equitable distribution of resources.

Social Justice: It aimed to prevent permanent servitude and ensure the dignity and freedom of all individuals, regardless of their economic standing. It promotes solidarity and mutual responsibility within the community.

b. Democracy:

While the ancient Israelite society was not a democracy in the modern sense, the Jubilee principles lay groundwork for democratic ideals:

Equality and Participation: The emphasis on the redistribution of resources and the release of slaves suggests a concern for a society where all members have a basic level of dignity and opportunity, which are foundational to democratic participation.

Prevention of Tyranny: By preventing the perpetual concentration of wealth and power, the Jubilee principles inherently work against systems that could lead to authoritarianism or the exploitation of the many by the few.

c. Peace:

Justice and peace are inextricably linked in the Biblical vision.

Social Harmony: The Jubilee aimed to create a society free from the tensions and conflicts that arise from extreme poverty, debt, and oppression. By ensuring basic security and dignity for all, it fostered a more harmonious and peaceful community.

Reconciliation: The act of debt forgiveness and land return was intended to be a process of reconciliation, healing divisions, and restoring relationships within the community. ●

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To be continued

In the next issue

D. The Practice of Jubilee Today

Metropolitan Mar Aprem of the Chaldean Syrian Church, an Indian ecumenical leader, passes away

>>> Contd. from Page 8 Col. 1

were always open to us, for a friendly conversation, about his own academic pursuits, history of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East, overseas visits and meetings with Pope John Paul, Dr. Billy Graham and the leaders of the World Council of Churches.

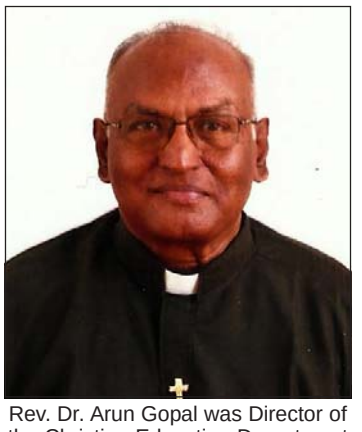
His Grace was simple, cordial and unassuming in his movements. He was easily approachable and composed, in his relationship with us, who were in the process of ministerial formation. The Metropolitan ate in the students' mess, joined us for physical jerks, and worshipped in the UTC Chapel, sitting in the pews along with us. It is true that the Metropolitan used to attend the special functions and celebrations in UTC, in his official Episcopal garments, wearing a Mitre. Yet, he took his seat along with the students. He never aspired to be in the lime - light. Thus, humility was an important trait of his personality.

A Tribute to His Grace Late Mar Aprem

After completing my B.D., studies at UTC I returned to my parent Diocese of Madras - Church of South India. After many years having completed my Master's and Doctoral Research programs, while I was a visiting faculty in UTC, occasionally I used to meet Metropolitan Mar Aprem in the UTC library. He was the same George Mooken whom I had known as Metropolitan Mar Aprem. Being a scholar he continued his research as the President of the Church History Association of India, and translating the relevant Syriac documents into English and Malayalam.

In conclusion, it has to be affirmed that the Metropolitan was genuinely human. He enjoyed friendly moments and made us cherish his company with his timely jokes. His book-"Bishop's Jokes" with a forward by the Valia Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church - Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom, speaks volumes about his "People - Friendly" Life style. Thirumeni Mar Aprem is certainly a role model to many contemporary Priests and Bishops.

May his soul rest in peace, and may the light of Christ continue to shine upon this Ecumenical Leader and Elder Brother. ●



Rev. Dr. Arun Gopal was Director of the Christian Education Department and the Pastoral Aid Department of the CSI Synod. He was also Prof. of Christian Education in the Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji Islands, Professor at Gurukul Theological College and Research Instititue, Chennai and at United Theological College, Bangalore.

World Communion of Reformed Churches

World Communion of Reformed Churches: 150th Anniversary Service

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 4

Council (REC) in 2010 to form today's World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Nyomi also read from the Belhar Confession, emphasizing justice, unity and reconciliation as core theological commitments for the communion's future.

Greetings

Leaders from across the Reformed tradition brought greetings.

Karen Campbell, on behalf of the United Reformed Church, reflected on the strength of belonging to a diverse but united global family: "When we're feeling lonely, we can see that we have siblings across continents and cultures... we belong to each other."

The Rev. William McLaren, representing the Church of Scotland, called the WCRC "a family close to our hearts," recalling his denomination's foundational role in 1875 and celebrating the Reformed tradition's worldwide reach.

The Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum, of the Council for World Mission, noted a shared birthday between the WCRC and his organization—July 18—and praised their twin commitments to peace, justice and prophetic witness:

Rooted in Psalm 96, Kassab's sermon called the church to "sing a new song," not only in melody but in mission— to center worship in justice, foster inclusive communities, and carry the gospel's witness beyond sanctuary walls.

Rev. Najla Kassab, President of the WCRC, and Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the WCRC. *Photo Kevin Snyman*

"This is not just a historical milestone," Keum said. "It is the unfolding story of a communion born of conviction."

In a world often marked by division and hardship, the 150th anniversary celebration of the World Communion of Reformed Churches served as a powerful reminder that hope endures through unity and faith expressed not only in words but in song. As voices from across the globe lifted in worship, testimony, and prayer, the event echoed a profound truth: even when circumstances threaten to silence us, the spirit of the church—the "last string" in George Watts' painting of Hope—continues to play a resilient, defiant tune. This anniversary was not only a moment to honor a rich heritage but also a call to carry forward a legacy of justice, inclusivity, and steadfast witness as the WCRC looks toward its future with courage and conviction.

– WCRC News

Remembering Pope Francis:

A legacy of interreligious dialogue and hope

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 1

eventually to innovate reform movements to alter how we perceive, think and conceive the other as well as the planet," said Mons. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku K., secretary of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican. "It was from his deep identity – being grounded in a living faith in Christ – his dialogue began. He underlined that true openness involved remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being open to walk and work together with the other.", he adds.

Pope Francis's participation in the historic Human Fraternity meeting in Abu Dhabi in 2019, alongside Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb, and the cosigning of the Declaration on Human Fraternity, marked a turning point in modern interfaith relations. The document called for global fraternity, respect for religious diversity, and rejection of extremism. It has since inspired countless initiatives across civil society, academia, and faith-based communities.

Pope Francis's message was never limited to symbolic gestures. He proposes the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) as a model of responding to the challenges of our times who interrupting his journey, changed his plans, and unexpectedly came to the aid of an injured person who needed his help. He further noted that in the story of the Good Samaritan what is constantly being repeated and emphasized is the importance of dialogue with all to heal the wounded humanity and the earth.

"Pope Francis was undoubtedly a beloved Holy Father, transcending distinctions of race, gender, and religion. His unique personality inaugurated a new custom within the Catholic Church—one characterised by direct engagement with the faithful, a prophetic voice in defence of the marginalised, and significant interfaith initiatives undertaken in collaboration with prominent leaders of the world's major religions."

Pope Francis visits the World Council of Churches, Geneva, 21 June 2018, Photo WCC

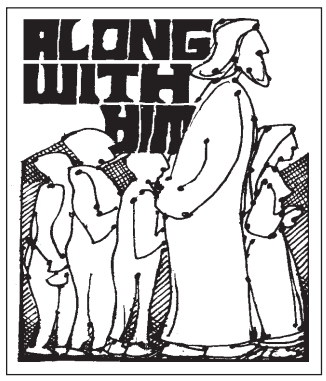
His teachings on fraternity, care for creation, and compassion for the marginalized resonated deeply with Christians, brothers and sisters of other religious traditions and people of good will. He invited all to assume a prophetic attitude, to express deep concepts through simple words and phrases, to put aside all intellectual sophistications, and to speak to everyone. His pastoral presence at global hotspots and his insistence on the human face of migration, climate injustice, and poverty challenged religious leaders to act together in solidarity.

His involvement in ecumenical events – including the 2016 commemoration of the Reformation in Lund – served as a reminder that reconciliation within Christianity also paves the way for broader religious cooperation. But it was in his consistent outreach to Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Indigenous communities that his deep interreligious vocation was most powerfully felt.

"Pope Francis was proposing an alternative social model to address the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth based on a 'revolution of tenderness' which provides the followers of different religious traditions and all people of goodwill with a common platform to collaborate for the common good. Therefore, his 'dialogue of mercy' paved the way for 'dialogue of action' and 'dialogue of action' to 'dialogue of hope,' "Mons. Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku K. continues." He also insisted that dialogue table must include all, not limiting merely to a few leaders of religious communities, but must also extend as far as possible to all believers, engaging the different sectors of civil society including women and young people as well."

Prof. Dr Angeliki Ziaka, WCC programme executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, said that "Pope Francis was undoubtedly a beloved Holy Father, transcending distinctions of race, gender, and religion." His unique personality inaugurated a new custom within the Catholic Church—one characterised by direct engagement with the faithful, a prophetic voice in defence of the marginalised, and significant interfaith initiatives undertaken in collaboration with prominent leaders of the world's major religions," she said. "Through both his actions and discourse, he demonstrated that interreligious rapprochement is not merely a theological concern, but also an urgent practical, ethical, and existential imperative for religious communities and humanity at large. Pope Francis articulated a message that resonated far beyond the Christian world, inspiring a global audience and encapsulating the very essence of the Christian gospel, that of love. May he rest in peace."

– WCC News



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Mammen Varkey

"Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at the table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation……" So when the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it." Mark 16:14-20 (RSV)

The series of encounters, the Risen Lord had with his disciples began, as per *The Gospel According to Mark,* as they 'sat at the table'. And those encounters enabled them to have new and totally transforming revelations of the Gospel. They did have a new understanding, and a higher vision, of the Gospel Jesus embodied. And the history testifies that they dedicated themselves to preach this Gospel to the whole creation.

Post - Easter Reflections - 7

What exactly is the final commissioning?

'conversion', 'commitment' of his disciples, the Risen Lord commissioned them to 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in the tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Mark 16: 15-18.

Reject the shallow understanding

Not 'Crown' but 'Cross'

The most important thing about these encounters is that the Risen Lord revealed to them not the 'Crown' but promised them the 'Cross'. He did not offer them or entice them with, thrones, power, position, or success. But he called them to take the way of the Cross and to face thrashes, tortures and death.

Go into all the world

Convinced of the new

This final commissioning by the Risen Lord of his disciples, especially of those whom he had selected, has to be understood very deeply. **A shallow understanding and very ordinary, common way of comprehending, will not help us to fully open ourselves to the supreme purpose, God, the Parent, has for the creation.** One of the most important of these was shared in the last reflection. **It is the Parent God's redemptive purpose or plan for the whole creation.**

Indwelling of the Spirit

Secondly, it is stated, the believers will cast out demons (RSV) 'devils' (King James Version). Very clearly, the believers cannot allow or ignore, the 'demons' or 'devil' pitching tent in themselves and others. **Because our bodies are the dwelling place of the divine. We need to have a clear understanding of the 'demon' or 'devil'. The 'demon' or 'devil' is to be understood as the embodiment or personification of the negation, rejection or even the absence of godliness. The historical realization of the indwelling of the Spirit of God, Luke 3: 22, is well manifested in the life, ministry and death of Jesus Christ. When we refuse to allow the spirit to indwell in us, we are, perhaps unknowingly, unconsciously, welcoming the 'devil' and permit him to 'indwell' in us.** Certain mental diseases, bodily conditions are not, really, the state of the indwelling of the devil. They are only physical or mental illnesses. **When we reject God's purposes for us, we are emptying ourselves of godliness. And that state of ours is figuratively expressed as the indwelling of the demon.**

When the Spirit of God indwells in us, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, Galatians 5: 22,23, will blossom in us and spread fragrance around us. If the Spirit is not indwelling in us, that state is described as the indwelling of the demon, devil or Satan. And the result will be fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness. **Galatians 5: 19, 20, 21.**

The Risen Lord called upon his disciples to go out to all nations and help people to free themselves from the grip of 'Satan' 'to cast out the 'demon' indwelling in them, to regain the essential Godliness in them, and to become the children of God. ●

To be continued

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

Do Not Forget To Say Thanks

A. V. Itty

Lk. 17:11-19

"When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself to the ground at Jesus' feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan" (vs. 15,16).

People in the foreign countries say thanks even for small things. But many people in our land do not say so, even for very important things. It is a mark of nobility to say thanks for the helps and blessings that we receive from others. We should also be grateful to God for all the blessings that we receive from Him.

There is no doubt that the Samaritan who came back to thank him for healing him of his leprosy, made Jesus happy. But the other nine who were Jews, who were habitual in talking highly of their racial greatness, turned out to be ungrateful and thus caused sadness and pain to Jesus.

God wants us to live in humility and gratitude, and to consider our wealth, our capabilities, and everything else that we enjoy, as gifts from God.

The good deeds and the helps that we render to others, reveal the Godliness in us. Saying thanks for the good deeds and the helps we receive from others too, is part of that divinity.

"Weren't there ten who were healed? Where are the other nine? No one other than this Samaritan has come back to give thanks to God" (v.18): This praise for the grateful man and the criticism about the others show the response of Jesus. **Let us try to live in gratitude to God and other human beings, for the good that we receive from them. May God help us for that.** ●

Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)

Food For Thought:

Ingratitude is a sin which God hates.

WORDTOON

SUMMON SOME ONE when you need help!

WORDTOON

Christian Conference of Asia
an organ and fellowship of churches and ecumenical councils in asia for initiating and facilitating dynamic christian witness and action

Metropolitan Mar Aprem of the Chaldean Syrian Church, an Indian ecumenical leader, passes away

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) mourns the passing away of Metropolitan Mar Aprem, former Head of the Chaldean Syrian Church (Church of the East) in India. He was 85 years old.

Widely recognised as a distinguished scholar, historian, and prolific author, Dr Mar Aprem served as the spiritual head of the Church of the East in India for more than half a century, until 2023.

Born in Thrissur, Kerala, India, in 1940, the late Metropolitan was a shepherd to generations of the faithful in his church since he was consecrated as a Bishop fifty-seven years ago. After theological studies in India, England, and the United States, he was consecrated as a bishop in 1968 and elevated to the rank of Metropolitan at the age of 28.

Dr. Mar Aprem authored more than 65 books on church history, theology, and ecumenism. His work not only helped preserve the ancient heritage of the entire Church of the East but also built bridges with other Christian traditions.

He was an active and respected figure in the ecumenical movement, contributing meaningfully to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Conference of Asia.

Recollecting his long association with Metropolitan Mar Aprem, CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara stated, "The late lamented Metropolitan had a longstanding commitment and passion for nurturing inter-church and inter-religious relations. His profound scholarship in Church history and deep knowledge of the Syriac language and liturgy have been widely recognised".

Throughout his life, Dr Mar Aprem was a committed ecumenist, serving as an official delegate of the Church of the East at various international ecumenical conferences including the WCC Assemblies. He served on committees of various national and international ecumenical bodies.

For decades, Dr Mar Aprem held consecutive roles on various committees of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and served as a long-time member of the Board of Directors of the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA).

He also served as President of the Church History Association of India (CHAI) from 1976 to 1982.

In recognition of his cultural and ecumenical contributions, Metropolitan Mar Aprem was awarded the Medal of Merit by the Coptic Orthodox Cultural Centre, Venice.

CCA extends its heartfelt condolences to the faithful of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East in India and joins in prayer with all who mourn his passing away.

The Chaldean Syrian Church of India is an Eastern Christian denomination, based in Thrissur, in India. It is part of the greater Assyrian Church of the East. It is organised as an Archdiocese. It represents the part of traditional Christian communities that follow the East Syriac Rite in the Malabar region of India. *– CCA News*

A Tribute to His Grace Late Mar Aprem

– Arun Gopal –

Having been brought up in a family of Priests, I developed a great respect and admiration, for Metropolitan Mar Aprem, from the time I met him at UTC Hostel in Bangalore. For the Metropolitan started his Doctoral Research, almost at the same time when I joined UTC for my B.D. studies (1969 - '72).

He stayed in the old Men's Hostel, along with us, and mixed freely with all students irrespective of denominational, and regional differences. Although Dr. Mar Aprem was always in his saffron cassock and a sash, in his room he was dressed like any one of us.His doors

Contd. Page 5 Col. 1 ..>>>

CHEER CHAT

The people who are crazy enough
to think that they can
change the world
are the ones who do.

– Steve Jobs

90th Birthday of Prof Dr. *Ulrich Duchrow:* A Colloquium

"Justice for a shared future for Palestinians and Israelis"

From left to right: Dr. Shir Hever, Prof. Mitri Raheb, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Duchrow at the Colloquium on Palestine

On the occasion of the 90th Birthday of Prof Dr. *Ulrich Duchrow* (June 13) a COLLOQUIUM was held in the Bonhoeffer Congregation in Heidelberg, Germany, on June 20. The Topic was "Justice for a shared future for Palestinians and Israelis".

Speakers were Prof. Dr. *Mitri Raheb*, rector of the Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem/ Palestine. He presented his book *Decolonizing Palestine. The Land, the People, the Bible.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 2023, which Ulrike and Ulrich Duchrow had translated into German. Dr. *Shir Hever*, spoke on the topic "Political and economic conditions for equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis". He comes from Israel and now lives in Karlsruhe/Germany as Executive of the "Alliance for Justice between Israrlis and Palestinians/BIP". His recent books are: *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation. Repression Beyond Exploitation.* London: Pluto Press, 2010, and *The Privatization of Israeli Security.* London: Pluto Press, 2018.

The lectures were followed by discussions of experts on the German and US proliferation of weapons and political support for the Israeli genocide and occupation of the Palestinian people which is the main reason why, at present, both communities do not have a future. So social movements in Palestine, Israel, USA and Germany for organizing pressure from below must be strengthened.

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Duchrow was a

· Professor of systematic theology and social ethics at the University of Heidelberg/ Germany, and he is specialised in ecumenical and interreligious theology and theology-economy issues.

· From 1979-2000 he was the Regional officer of Mission and Ecumenism in the Protestant Church in Baden.

· Co-founder and honorary chair of Kairos Europa, an ecumenical grassroots network striving for economic justice together with organisations of the marginalized and with solidarity groups (secular and church-related).

· Prof. Ulrich has worked in various capacities with the World Council of Churches (particularly in the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation as well as a guest-professor in the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, 1977-1978), the Lutheran World Federation as director of the Department of Studies 1970-1977 and the World Alliance of a Reformed Churches (as member of the Task Force on the Process of Confession against economic injustice and ecological destruction, 1997-2004)

Some of the Publications of his in German, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian:

- Conflict over the Ecumenical Movement. Confessing Christ Today in the Universal Church. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981.

- Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches?. Geneva: WCC, 1987.

- Europe in the World System 1492-1992 – Is Justice Possible?. Geneva: WCC, 1991.

- Alternatives to Global Capitalism - Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action. Utrecht: International Books with Kairos Europa (1995), 1998 2nd ed.

- Prof. Ulrich was the co-editor of 5 volumes on "Radicalizing Reformation – provoked by the Bible and Today's Crises (cf. https://www.radicalizing-reformation.com/) ●

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A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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